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Tying the Knot After 40

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To rephrase the opening line of Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice": It is a truth universally acknowledged — especially by Jewish mothers — that a Jewish single man in possession of a good fortune and over the age of 35 must be in want of a wife ... who is in her 20s.

Matchmakers can substantiate this apparent truth with their own experience.

"Men explicitly say to me they want significantly younger women, no matter what age they are," said Judith Gottesman, founder of Berkeley-based Soul Mates Unlimited, a statewide matchmaking service. "For men in their late 30s and up, it's an issue for them."

Ilana Gutman, owner of Global Match, an Encino matchmaking service specializing in the Israeli American community, faces the same preference among her male clients. "When a man comes to my office and he's around 40 years old, the first thing he wants is to have a family, so he doesn't want to be with someone who has a limit on having kids," she said.

But a few local wives have proven to Jewish matchmakers and mothers worldwide that a single woman can take pride in being in her 30s and meet an eligible man not prejudiced by her age.

Michelle Kleinert Bader, 43, always dreamed of her wedding day, but by the time she reached 39, she wondered if she would ever tie the knot.

"There were times when I was down and out and didn't think it would happen, but I remained positive and focused on all the things I was grateful for in my life," she said.

Pressured by the ticking of her biological clock, societal expectations, her Moroccan mother's worries and readiness to move on to the next phase of her life, she considered marriage proposals from men she knew weren't her beshert (fated), but she maintained faith in her path and resolved to enjoy a fulfilled life filled with family, friends and a satisfying career.

At age 42, a few months into her new job as executive director of William Morris Endeavor Entertainment's philanthropic department, she started dating Jeff, 44 years old at the time and never married. After a year and a half of dating, they signed their ketubah on Jan. 18, 2009.

"He has everything that I want in a guy and more," said Kleinert Bader, a former marketing and communications director for The Jewish Journal. "He had qualities I didn't even know to look for in a partner."

Elementary school counselor Lisa Diamond, 42, suffered from a fear commonly associated with men: marriage phobia.

"Honestly, I really didn't want to get married for a long time," she said. "I think I was really just scared. At some point, I said you better get over the fear or you're not getting married."

She met Scott through JDate, a service she had used on and off for years, alongside single events, speed dating and setups — basically, she tried everything. ("It's not that it works, it's that you work it," she said of JDate.) They're celebrating their first anniversary on June 22.

"When I started dating Scott, each time we went out, it wasn't scary; he didn't pressure me," she said. "I didn't feel scared with him. It was really easygoing. Each time I said I can do this, and I tried not to jump ahead, and I went with the flow. I think that's what did it."



Scott and Lisa Diamond

Women in their late 30s or 40s who may feel discouraged about their prospects for marriage can glean tips from Kleinert Bader's and Diamond's experiences.

First, women should consider men who are not their long-cherished "type" while not lowering their standards.

Kleinert Bader and her groom-to-be had socialized in the same circles for years, but the timing was never right because "I was too busy liking guys who were wrong for me, but I did learn from all of them, and they prepared me for the right one."

Likewise, Diamond opened her heart to men she would have normally dismissed in her 30s. "Typically, I think I would kind of brush people off."

On their first date she didn't experience instant fireworks with Scott, rather, a spark of love that grew brighter with every date.

"People say you can't be so picky," Kleinert Bader said. "I think there are natural courses that change. You can say you'll marry someone who is divorced or who has kids, but you shouldn't lower standards to 'I should go out with just anybody.' Then you lower your self-esteem."

Gutman of Global Match offers similar advice to female clients above the age of 35. "You don't need to compromise on his character ... but you may need to compromise about his age, his economic situation or whether or not he has kids."

Second, women should enjoy their lives without a mate.

"You know when it happens?" Kleinert Bader said. "It's true what they say, when you relax and go on with your own life."

Diamond, too, always maintained an active and busy life. "I really wasn't that lonely," she said.

Third, the question of bearing children shouldn't hinder the natural progress of a relationship.

"I think he was more interested in meeting the right person, believing the kid thing would work itself out somehow," Diamond said of her husband.

And Kleinert Bader has now shifted her focus from getting married to having children, while seeking to maintain the undemanding attitude that characterized her courtship. "You don't want to have that biological clock in your relationship," she said.

As a matchmaker, Gottesman encourages male clients to reconsider their preoccupation with marrying a younger woman, whom they perceive as more fertile, believing that men and women within the same age range are naturally more compatible and more likely to share similar values, goals and lifestyles.

"You shouldn't be looking at a woman as a baby-maker but as a partner in your life," she stressed. "If you love each other, you'll figure out a way to have children."

Fourth, have faith.

Kleinert Bader held out and got a fairy tale ending with a twist of reality. As an executive at ABC, Jeff surprised her with a marriage proposal staged on the set of her favorite reality television show, "The Bachelor."

He led her to the rose ceremony room where the show televises the elimination round. "Bachelor" host Chris Harrison presented Jeff with a single rose on a tray, mimicking the scene in which the starring bachelor chooses his desired match: "Jeff, this is the final rose. Whenever you're ready," he said to Jeff. The scene was filmed for the couple's own keepsake.

"So when you hold out and have faith and believe, it can really happen for you," she said.

It's advice Gottesman, single at 39, gives both herself and her clients. "The Jewish concept of a soul mate is that God predestined you to be together, so one way or another he will be there," she said.

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